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Atty. Docket No.: P71361US0

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A pair of underpants comprising a front part ~~(1,32)~~, a back part, a crotch part ~~(2,34)~~ and two leg holes ~~(3)~~ delimited by the parts, a releasable connection having two parts that join in an overlapped region when in a closed condition to connect the crotch part to the front part and that are separated from one another when in an open condition to allow and ~~connecting means (4,30, 31) for connecting the crotch part (2,34) to the front part (1,32) and allowing an opening to be formed in the crotch area, said releasable connection connecting means (4,30, 31) extending from one leg hole (3) to the other, and comprising two parts one overlapping the other in the closed condition a flexible protection element that at least partly covers said overlapping region in the closed condition to increase wearer comfort~~ characterized in that ends (6) of a part of said connecting means (4,30, 31) are provided with flexible protection means (5, 11,21, 33).

2. (Currently Amended) A The pair of underpants according to claim 1, wherein the two leg holes are part of the opening ~~to be~~

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formed in the crotch area in the open condition ~~includes the leg holes (3)~~.

3. (Currently Amended) A The pair of underpants according to claim 1, wherein the flexible protection ~~means (5,11, 21,33)~~ are placed one element is attached to the outer overlapping part of the releasable ~~connecting means (4,30, 31)~~ connection and is adapted to fold around the releasable connection in the closed condition.

4. (Currently Amended) A The pair of underpants according to claim 1, wherein the flexible protection ~~means (5,11, 21,33)~~ are element is made of a material selected from the group consisting of cotton, nylon or any other material suitable for making straps or tapes worn against the skin, being relatively unstretchable and having a soft feel.

5. (Currently Amended) A The pair of underpants according to any claim 1, wherein the flexible protection element is means ~~(5,11, 21,33)~~ are in the form of one or more ribbons that cover the overlapped region in the closed condition.

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6. (Currently Amended) A The pair of underpants according to claim 5 wherein the ribbons have a length of about 15 mm to about 120 mm.

7. (Currently Amended) A The pair of underpants according to claim 1, wherein the flexible protection element is ~~means (11,21,33)~~ are in the form of loops that cover the overlapped region in the closed condition ~~(12)~~.

8. (Currently Amended) A The pair of underpants according to claim 7 wherein the loops have a length of about 95 mm to about 160 mm enabling the ~~loop~~ loops to hold diameters from about 30 mm to about 50 mm.

9. (Currently Amended) A The pair of underpants according to claim 1, wherein the flexible protection element has ~~means (5,11,21,33)~~ have a width sufficient to cover an ~~the whole~~ edge ~~(6)~~ of the releasable connection ~~connecting means (4,30,31)~~.

10. (New) The pair of underpants according to claim 1, wherein the flexible protection element is attached to the inner

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overlapping part of the releasable connection and is adapted to fold around the releasable connection in the closed condition.

11. (New) The pair of underpants according to claim 10, wherein a portion of the flexible protection element is secured to an outer side of said underpants by a fastening component when in the closed condition.

12. (New) A pair of underpants comprising a front part, a back part, a crotch part and two leg holes delimited by the parts, a releasable connection having two parts that join when in a closed condition to connect the crotch part to the front part and that are separated from one another when in an open condition to allow an opening to be formed in the crotch area, said releasable connection extending from one leg hole to the other, and a flexible protection element adapted to fold around said releasable connection when in the closed condition to increase wearer comfort.

13. (New) The pair of underpants according to claim 12, wherein the two leg holes are part of the opening formed in the crotch area in the open condition.

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14. (New) The pair of underpants according to claim 12, wherein said two parts overlap in said closed condition as an outer overlapping part and an inner overlapping part.

15. (New) The pair of underpants according to claim 14, wherein the flexible protection element is attached to the outer overlapping part.

16. (New) The pair of underpants according to claim 14, wherein the flexible protection element is attached to the inner overlapping part in the closed condition.

17. (New) The pair of underpants according to claim 16, wherein a portion of the flexible protection element is secured to an outer side of said underpants by a fastening component when in the closed condition.

18. (New) The pair of underpants according to claim 12, wherein the flexible protection element is made of a material selected from the group consisting of cotton, nylon or any other material having a soft feel suitable for wearing against the skin.

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19. (New) The pair of underpants according to any claim 12, wherein the flexible protection element is in the form of a narrow elongated strip of a soft material suitable for wearing against the skin.

20. (New) The pair of underpants according to claim 19, wherein the strip of material has a width sufficient to cover an edge of the releasable connection.